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“My Heart Is a Piece of Stone”: Anxious Separations and Emotional Dislocations in British Correspondence from the Long Second World War

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Abstract Historians who write about emotion in wartime focus mainly on the experiences of front-line soldiers and of civilians under bombardment exposed to life-threatening events. However, in Britain in World War II, conscription, mobilization, and evacuation inflicted hugely disruptive separations on a large proportion of the population, and the emotions that they provoked have been under-examined. This paper excavates emotion in an unusually complete set of letters written by a British working-class couple between 1941 and 1946. Interpreting letter writing as a technology of the self, it explores their letter-writing practices and uses psychoanalytic theory to comprehend the anxieties that their letters document. Wartime and postwar separation, enforced by conscription, challenged their aspirations to a companionate marital style and added to the complexities of pregnancy and parenthood. The sickness and hospitalization of their baby in 1945–46, in the era before the establishment of the National Health Service, introduced a new dimension to separation. Occurring at a time when the couple were even further apart geographically than during the war itself and letters were the only regular means of connection, this trauma imposed massive marital and, particularly, maternal strain. By analyzing and contextualizing the increasingly fraught exchanges between a mother on her own and a man at the front line, this article throws new light on epistolary constructions of anxious separations and emotional dislocations in the long Second World War.

In February 1946 Christabel Pickard wrote from Sussex to her husband, Stanley, in Occupied Germany, “I don’t know that I want you home anyway. I feel as if I hate everybody and my heart is a piece of stone . . . I only want my baby.”¹ Christabel had reached an emotional low point. She was enduring two separations. One was from her husband, who was required to serve for a full

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¹ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 3 February 1946, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/E, The Keep, Falmer (This repository is hereafter abbreviated as TK.)

five years in the Royal Navy from May 1941 to May 1946, extending the couple's war well beyond the end of hostilities. The other was from their child, born in June 1944, who from January to March 1946 was hospitalized for an undiagnosed illness. As Christabel's graphic analogy suggests, the anxieties arising from this dual separation profoundly affected her emotional well-being.

Letters were the principal means of communication between those separated during the long Second World War, and Christabel and Stanley Pickard wrote regularly.² In this article, I explore the couple's epistolary practices and shifting subjectivities from 1941 to 1946. I make the case for the importance of letters for understanding the gendered character of wartime separation—not primarily, as in much historical literature, in terms of the supposed inability of women on the home front to understand the traumas of conflict faced by men at the front line, but the other way round. These letters document the emotional toll on a wife and mother of stressful experiences that were remote from those of a husband in the military, and they illuminate the role of epistolary practice in the struggle to articulate emotions and manage the gendered self.

Although the correspondence does not, for the most part, suggest that anxiety while they were apart had a disabling effect on the couple, there were marked spikes in the emotional temperature of the letters. These occurred particularly during Chris's pregnancy in the first half of 1944, and, even more strongly, in the winter of 1945–46, when their baby was hospitalized and Chris wrote that her heart felt like a piece of stone. After interrogating the couple's writing practices and the kind of marriage they sought to fashion, I focus on these crises. Emotional dislocations are psychological phenomena, and I draw on psychoanalytic insights to help to understand the shifting emotions inscribed in the letters.³

The experiences of front-line soldiers and civilians under bombardment preoccupy historians who have written about emotion in wartime.⁴ But as the wartime work of both Anna Freud and Richard Titmuss demonstrated, the multiple changes to social life on the home front in the Second World War, especially separation from family and friends, also provoked strong emotions.⁵ The mobilization of over five million men and women to the armed forces, the direction of many others to civilian work away from home, and the evacuation of schoolchildren from cities meant that separation was a common experience across social classes. The wartime and

² Christabel ("Chris") Pickard, née Turnbull, 1919–2016; Stanley ("Stan") Pickard, 1920–1987.

³ In particular, work in feminist psychoanalysis, including Alison Stone, *Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Maternal Subjectivity* (New York, 2012); Wendy Hollway, "From Motherhood to Maternal Subjectivity," *International Journal of Critical Psychology*, no. 2 (2001): 13–38; Dana Breen, *The Birth of a First Child: Towards an Understanding of Femininity* (London, 1975); Rozsika Parker, *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (London, 1995).

⁴ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester, 2009); Tracey Loughran, *Shell-Shock and Medical Culture in First World War Britain* (Cambridge, 2017); Amy Bell, "Landscapes of Fear: Wartime London, 1939–1945," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 1 (2009): 153–75; Joanna Bourke, "Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History," *History Workshop Journal* 55, no. 1 (2003): 111–33; Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London, 2005); Lucy Noakes, *Dying for the Nation: Death, Grief and Bereavement in Second World War Britain* (Manchester, 2020).

⁵ Lyndsey Stonebridge, "Anxiety at a Time of Crisis," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 45 (1998): 171–82; Richard M. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London, 1950), 346.

postwar experiences of Stan and Chris were common to many young people in British society. They included marriage and the birth of a child in the context of separation, which was enforced by the state's requirement that young men should give military service wherever and for as long as they were needed, regardless of marital and parental status.

In forcing Chris and Stan apart, the war both heightened their anxieties and led them to put pen to paper almost daily. Letter writing became, as Christa Hämmerle has put it, “a mass cultural phenomenon” in the two world wars, stimulated by the spread of compulsory education, rising literacy rates, the state-backed postal system, and the limited availability of other technologies such as the telephone.⁶ However, most archived and published collections of wartime letters are those of middle-class writers. In contrast, the correspondence between Stanley and Christabel Pickard represents a remarkable body of working-class writing and documents intimate and sometimes agonizing experiences rarely accessible to historians. Without claiming that the Pickards were typical, I use their correspondence to explore their unique subjectivities in dynamic interaction with historical processes that affected the entire population.⁷

In my study of the Pickards' correspondence, I engage with four areas of scholarship. The first is letter writing in wartime. Studies of wartime letter writing have focused largely on epistolary clues to the motivations and emotional survival of fighting men.⁸ Often missing in this work, however, are the meanings of separation for those on the home front. Letters sent home by men away at war were habitually carefully preserved, while letters from those at home to itinerant correspondents were frequently lost.⁹ The mere existence of both sides of the Pickards' correspondence is one of its remarkable features. It reveals the contrasting ways in which the couple expressed their love for each other, as well as their jealousies, as they sought to preserve and develop their marriage in the context of highly divergent wartime experiences. In addition to enabling examination of the inflection of marriage and parenthood by war from the point of view of both partners, the correspondence offers an unusual opportunity to interrogate the emotional effects of wartime separation on a woman on the home front. Chris Pickard receives a large share of attention in what follows, because her letters provide a rare glimpse into the largely undocumented experiences of a young working-class wife and mother in the long

⁶ Christa Hämmerle, “‘You Let a Weeping Woman Call You Home?’ Private Correspondences during the First World War in Austria and Germany,” trans. Amy Krois-Lindner, in *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1660–1945*, ed. Rebecca Earle (Aldershot, 1999), 152–12, at 153.

⁷ My approach follows the biographical methodology used by, for example, Martha Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), based on the World War I letters of a French peasant couple, and James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford, 2010), which uses World War II diaries.

⁸ Hämmerle, “‘You Let a Weeping Woman’”; Martha Hanna, “A Republic of Letters: The Epistolary Tradition in France during World War I,” *American Historical Review* 108, no. 5 (2003): 1338–61; John Horne, “Soldiers, Civilians and the Warfare of Attrition: Representations of Combat in France, 1914–1918,” in *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War*, ed. Frans Coetzee and Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee (Oxford, 1995), 223–49; Roper, *Secret Battle*; Hester Vaizey, *Surviving Hitler's War: Family Life in Germany, 1939–48* (Basingstoke, 2010). On historians' uses of wartime letters, see Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice* (Abingdon, 2019), 28–34.

⁹ Summerfield, *Histories of the Self*, 23.

Second World War.¹⁰ I argue that wartime correspondence had an edgy, dual character: although essential for emotional survival, it was never entirely sufficient because of its tendency to provoke fears, doubts, and conflicting feelings.

The second area of scholarship is the history of marriage. Historians and sociologists have traced to the interwar and postwar years the advent of a companionate style of marriage characterized by sharing, teamwork, and sexual and emotional closeness, and they have associated it primarily with the middle class. They have explored tensions within the concept, including both the instability of the model of marital intimacy and sexuality on which it was based and the absence of gender equality.¹¹ I explore the challenges faced by a young couple seeking to shape their lives around such a model and argue that gender, war, and separation worked against the mutuality at its heart.

If ideas about marriage were in flux in this period, so, too, were notions about maternal practice. A third area of scholarship is the shifting ideals of motherhood in the mid-twentieth century, when a long-standing preoccupation with the importance of maternal care was intensified by psychological ideas about the harmful psychic effects on a child of deprivation of maternal devotion.¹² The correspondence between the Pickards offers an unusual opportunity to scrutinize the subjective meanings of motherhood in its early stages, times when women have, historically, left few traces of their experiences and feelings, especially those concerned with caring for a sick child.¹³ It gives access to a young mother's investment in ideals of motherhood in the 1940s, her attempts to put them into practice, and the brutal contradiction of her efforts by the starkly contrasting emotional regime she confronted when her baby was hospitalized.

The fourth field of scholarship is the history of hospitalization of sick children during and after the Second World War. Scrutiny of hospital practice at this time is overshadowed in the historiography by discussion of the significant expansion of the British welfare state with, at its heart, the triumphant creation in 1948 of the National Health Service offering medical care free to users.¹⁴ Provision of care was

¹⁰ Diaries submitted to the social research organization Mass Observation during World War Two have provided historians with valuable material, but few if any were written by young working-class women. Jennifer Purcell, for example, uses Mass Observation diaries to depict the wartime lives of six British housewives, two of whom were working class, but both were in their fifties, with grown-up children in the war. Jennifer Purcell, *The Domestic Soldiers* (London, 2010).

¹¹ Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield, "Social Reconstruction and the Emergence of Companionate Marriage, 1945–59," in *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change: Writings for Jacqueline Burgoyne (1944–88)*, ed. David Clark (London, 1991), 6–27; Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 2003); Claire Langhamer, "Adultery in Post-War England," *History Workshop Journal* 62, no. 1 (2006): 86–115; Claire Langhamer, "Love, Selfhood and Authenticity in Post-War Britain," *Cultural and Social History* 9, no. 2 (2012): 277–97; Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford, 2013).

¹² Angela Davis, *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, c. 1945–2000* (Manchester, 2012); Anna Karpf, "Constructing and Addressing the 'Ordinary Devoted Mother,'" *History Workshop Journal*, no. 78 (2014): 82–106; Michal Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge, 2013).

¹³ See Sarah Knott, "Theorizing and Historicizing Mothering's Many Labours," *Past and Present*, no. 246, Supplement 15 (2020): 1–24.

¹⁴ See, for example, Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London, 1975); Paul Addison, *Now the War Is Over: A Social History of Britain, 1945–51* (London, 1985); Rodney

one thing, the nature of care another: historians exploring regimes of care after this point have argued that hospital policies were resistant to concerns about the emotional and psychological well-being of young patients and that practices were slow to change.¹⁵ The correspondence used here illuminates the emotional experience of hospital regimes of family separation in the years immediately before 1948. I argue that, in hospitals as in other British institutions at this time, the profound anxieties stimulated by separation were largely ignored.

Historical studies of the origins of the welfare state and the development of the National Health Service tend to focus on institutional practice and the politics of provision of care. Similarly, historical discussion of the history of marriage and motherhood often operates at the level of changing policy ideals. This article joins the growing volume of work that prioritizes subjectivity. I seek to illuminate these fields of study from the perspective of lived experience recorded in epistolary narratives. Through scrutiny of one couple's correspondence in relation to the deeper historical context, I aim to enlarge understanding of the social history of marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, child illness, and hospitalization in Britain in the 1940s, and to contribute to the gendered history of anxiety, separation, maternal subjectivity, and letter writing during and after the Second World War.

EPISTOLARITY, LOVE, AND MARRIAGE

Letters fling a bridge across the gulf of separation. They can be understood as a “technology of the self”—that is, as a means by which the self and its emotions may be managed through self-reflexive use of the written word.¹⁶ Historians who have engaged with the idea of technologies of the self have focused mainly on diary writing.¹⁷ Letter writing offers similar opportunities for self-scrutiny and reflection, yet, as a written conversation, correspondence is different.¹⁸ As Matt Houlbrook argues, “Letter-writing is both a performance and a dialogue between correspondents.”¹⁹ Letter writers fashion their identities, elaborate on selected areas of everyday experience, and negotiate emotional and psychological conflict in conjunction

Lowe, “The Second World War, Consensus, and the Foundation of the Welfare State,” *Twentieth Century British History* 1, no. 2 (1990): 152–82; Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914–1945* (Cambridge, 1993).

¹⁵ Harry Hendrick, “Children’s Emotional Well-Being and Mental Health in Post-Second World-War Britain: The Case of Unrestricted Hospital Visiting,” in *Cultures of Child Health in Britain and the Netherlands in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Marijke R. Gijswijt-Hofstra and Hilary Marland (Amsterdam, 2003), 213–42; Alex Mold, “Repositioning the Patient: Patient Organizations, Consumerism and Autonomy in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 87, no. 2 (2013): 225–49.

¹⁶ For the origins of the concept, see Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst, 1988): 16–49.

¹⁷ For example, Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1994); Tom Webster, “Writing to Redundancy: Approaches to Spiritual Journals and Early Modern Spirituality,” *Historical Journal* 39, no. 1 (1996): 33–56.

¹⁸ Hanna, “Republic of Letters,” 1344.

¹⁹ Matt Houlbrook, “‘A Pin to See the Peepshow’: Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in Edith Thompson’s Letters, 1921–1922,” *Past and Present*, no. 207 (2010): 215–49, at 226.

with a recipient whose subjectivity they simultaneously construct.²⁰ However, the bridge that letters created between correspondents in wartime was a flimsy one. As Martha Hanna has noted in relation to World War I, “letters hastily written and subject to unpredictable delays in delivery could either allay or heighten anxiety exacerbated by wartime separation.”²¹

Surviving collections of letters frequently consist of the correspondence of relatively well-educated people who were, almost by definition, “better off” financially.²² More generally, as Jane Hamlett writes, “middle-class and upper-class white families are heavily represented” in “the kinds of archives that we now have access to.”²³ Both Chris and Stan, though white, came from working-class families. Stan’s parents, a railway clerk and a former domestic servant, saved to buy their own small house and sought to improve their children’s life chances: Stan received a secondary education at grammar school before following his father into clerical work on Southern Railway. As a result of his parents’ aspirations, his education, and his later promotion within the Royal Navy, Stan occupied an ambiguous position on the fringes of the middle class. Chris, the daughter of a builder in irregular work and a housewife in poor health living in a house rented from the local council, had only an elementary education and was more straightforwardly working class. She started heavy manual work in a laundry at the age of fourteen. In 1939, Stan and Chris were both living with their parents and siblings on nearby streets in Eastbourne on the south coast of England. They married in August 1941 (figure 1), but Stan’s war service prevented them from living together, and they wrote regularly to each other from May 1941, when Stan joined the Royal Navy, until May 1946, when he was demobilized.

The Pickard family found the letters, some twelve hundred in all, in a battered suitcase after Chris’s death in 2016. After consultation with the extended family, Jeremy Pickard, one of the couple’s three surviving sons, edited and published them through a press facilitating self-publishing, a strategy that made this collection of intimate letters accessible not only to family members but also to a wider readership.²⁴

²⁰ For an extreme example, see Frank Mort, “Love in a Cold Climate: Letters, Public Opinion and Monarchy in the 1936 Abdication Crisis,” *Twentieth Century British History* 25, no. 1 (2014): 30–62.

²¹ Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*, 295. On the emotional importance of letters in relation to postal systems in wartime, see Roper, *Secret Battle*; Vaizey, *Surviving Hitler’s War*; Judy Barrett Litoff and D. C. Smith, “‘Will He Get My Letter?’ Popular Portrayals of Mail and Morale during World War II,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 23, no. 4 (1990): 21–44.

²² Roper detects an “element of bias towards the better off” in archived collections of First World War letters from the front; see Roper, *Secret Battle*, 28. Published collections of Second World War letters tend to be by well-educated, middle-class people: Eileen Alexander, *Love in the Blitz* (London, 2020); Tom Christopher and Alison Christopher, *Keep Smiling Through* (Lewes, 1990); Helen Cook and Bill Cook, *Khaki Parish: Our War—Our Love, 1940–1946* (Worthing, 1988); Maureen Wells, *Entertaining Eric* (London, 1988). For an exception, see Margaretta Jolly, ed., *Dear Laughing Motorbyke: Letters from Women Welders of the Second World War* (London, 1997), a collection of letters between working-class women war workers and the middle-class woman who trained them to weld and who became their friend. See also Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*, for the World War I correspondence of a French peasant couple.

²³ Jane Hamlett, “Mothering in the Archives: Care and the Creation of Family Papers and Photographs in Twentieth-Century Southern England,” *Past and Present*, no. 246, Supplement 15 (2020): 186–214, at 213.

²⁴ Jeremy Pickard, ed., *Stan and Chris in the War as Described in Their Letters* (York, 2017).



Figure 1—Stanley and Christabel Pickard on their wedding day, 2 August 1941. (Courtesy of Jeremy Pickard.)

He deposited the original letters in an archive in 2019, but because of the COVID-19–related lockdowns of 2020–21, they were inaccessible to members of the public until late in 2021.²⁵ My research for this article began with Pickard’s book, supported by correspondence with members of the Pickard family, and continued with scrutiny

²⁵ As noted above, the correspondence is archived at The Keep, Falmer, and is one of the small collections in the Mass Observation Archive.

of the entire collection of letters in the archive. This process revealed the scrupulousness with which Pickard edited the letters; it also enabled me to understand his approach to selection, which involved summarizing many of the letters and omitting repetitious material, including declarations of love, and descriptions of, for example, meals, tennis games, and football matches. Above all, examining the original letters provided access to the unwitting testimony of materials and practices intrinsic to the couple themselves: the notepaper, which became increasingly flimsy as the period of war extended, the use of ink or pencil, the size and style of handwriting, and the extraneous marks on the page.²⁶

The letters between the Pickards record their gendered experience of war, similar to that of many couples throughout British society: he roved while she was rooted to home. Chris was based in Eastbourne, with her parents and three younger sisters, working in a local laundry until April 1943, when she spent a few months with Stan, at his insistence, at the naval base in Lowestoft, where he was stationed, returning home pregnant and unwell. From the summer of 1945, she lived in Polegate, a village close to Eastbourne. Stan, as a young, fit man whose occupation as a clerk was not deemed essential, had no choice about joining the armed forces and remaining there until the state released him. In 1941–42, he served as an ordinary seaman on the destroyer HMS *Ambuscade* and was sent by the navy to Portsmouth, Iceland, Liverpool, and various ports on the south coast of England. Persuaded to apply for a commission, he went to the naval college at Greenwich and then to Fort William in Scotland for training on motor torpedo boats, after which, from 1942 to 1945, he was posted to Lowestoft, and later Felixstowe, in East Anglia, as a sublieutenant and eventually a lieutenant in Coastal Forces. The lengthy separations that the couple endured during Stan's four years of dangerous service were punctuated by brief periods of leave. But even after the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, they were not permanently reunited. Stan was required to spend six months in 1945–46 with the British Navy at Brunsbüttel in Occupied Germany.

The epistolary dialogue between Chris and Stan was important for the management not only of themselves as individuals but also of their relationship. It was a site on which they constructed themselves, each other, their marriage, and the advent of parenthood, in a situation in which they were physically together only intermittently. In a discussion of nineteenth-century French love letters, Martyn Lyons writes, “[p]ersonal letters have tactical objectives. They carry rhetorical ploys to provoke certain feelings, and they manipulate the reader's emotions.”²⁷ In Stan and Chris's declarations of love for each other, the “rhetorical ploys” not only underline differences in their written styles but are also indicative of a gendered social-class distinction between them, levered by their different educational experiences. Stan, grammar-school educated to the age of eighteen, evidently enjoyed penning literary flights of fancy.²⁸ “One day the ache I have in my heart for you

²⁶ Michael Roper, “Splitting in Unsent Letters: Writing as a Social Practice and a Psychological Activity,” *Social History* 26, no. 3 (2001): 318–39, especially 333; Hanna, “Republic of Letters,” 1349.

²⁷ Martyn Lyons, “Love Letters and Writing Practices: On *Écritures Intimes* in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Family History* 24, no. 2 (1999): 232–39, at 233.

²⁸ Lynn Abrams writes about the highly literary letters of another World War II serviceman to his less-well-educated wife. Unfortunately, the wife's letters have not survived. Lynn Abrams, “A Wartime Family Romance: Narratives of Masculinity and Intimacy during World War Two,” in *Nine Centuries of Man:*

will swell to such proportions that my frame will be unable to bear it and I shall burst into small pieces, all flying in the direction of Hampden Park,” he wrote in October 1942, more than a year after they married.²⁹ Chris replied that this was one of “the loveliest letters” he had ever sent but declared that she could not match it. Her letters bear witness to feelings of educational deficit and inferiority. Using a self-doubting formulation that she returned to frequently, she wrote, “I’m not very good at writing these things, but you know I love you beyond anything else this world has to offer.”³⁰ Stan, asserting his dominance both as a man and as someone familiar with the literary world of correspondence, tended to chastise her for not writing enough, and he even persuaded her to change her handwriting from a backward-sloping to an upright script while praising her for any long, descriptive passages that she managed.³¹ In a similar way to the improvements that Roper observed in rank-and-file soldiers’ letter writing in the First World War, Chris’s epistolary proficiency developed over the five years of the correspondence, although on Christmas Day of 1945 she echoed her earlier doubts: “I’m so hopeless at writing what I feel. But I can tell you that I love you with all my heart.”³² In any case, like the working-class women welders whose letter-writing practices Margaretta Jolly discusses, Chris expressed herself in “a language of romance, jokes, puns and dialect that exceeds the literal.”³³ In contrast to Stan’s descriptive and often lyrical style, she drew on a spoken mode of communication in letters laced with anecdotes and provocations that evoked the noisy banter of the family home in which she put pen to paper. In May 1941, referring to two of her younger sisters, she wrote, “There is a battle raging at the moment Poppy v. Daphne so I am afraid it isn’t much use trying to write any more.” She added cheekily (and inaccurately, in that they were married three months later), “Poppy said to end my letter with something romantic but I’m afraid those days are over between us.”³⁴

Sometimes Stan and Chris reflected explicitly on married love. About six weeks after their wedding, Chris wrote, “I do want our married life to be a success darling, and that’s why I’ve so often asked you if I am your friend as well as your lover.”³⁵ The style of marriage for which they were striving could be considered companionate. This term was used in the war and postwar years to describe marriages in which the worlds of husband and wife were not as profoundly separated as those of earlier generations, gender roles were less strictly demarcated, and couples enjoyed

Manhood and Masculinity in Scottish History, ed. Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Ewan (Edinburgh, 2017), 160–79, at 170.

²⁹ Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 22 October 1942, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 3/A. Hampden Park was the housing estate in Eastbourne where Chris’s family lived.

³⁰ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 24 October 1942, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 3/A.

³¹ For example, in response to Chris’s description of a walk on the Downs, Stan wrote, “the last part of your letter is the best piece of prose composition you’ve ever done and it gave me considerable pleasure to read it.” Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 9 April 1942, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 2/L.

³² Roper, *Secret Battle*, 55. See also Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*, 295. Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 25 December 1945, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 6/O.

³³ Jolly, *Dear Laughing Motorbyke*, 26.

³⁴ Christabel Turnbull to Stanley Pickard, 15 May 1941, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 1/G.

³⁵ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 24 September 1941, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 2/E.

more companionship, shared leisure, mutual sexual pleasure, and stronger emotional bonds.³⁶

Sociologists of the 1940s and 1950s suggested that middle-class marriages were more likely to display such characteristics than were those of working-class couples, because middle-class occupational circumstances were less polarized and kinship networks tended to be less close-knit, factors that were seen as conducive to closer and more cooperative conjugal relationships.³⁷ Wartime letters and diaries by middle-class individuals seem to confirm these findings. They include the Mass Observation diaries of Ernest van Someren and Mathew and Bertha Walton, discussed by James Hinton; and, respectively, the wartime letters of Helen Appleton and Bill Cook, and Alison Dowler and Tom Christopher, which have been published as edited volumes.³⁸ However, there are also personal accounts of distinctly polarized middle-class marriages at this time.³⁹ On the other hand, there is a frustrating lack of equivalent evidence concerning working-class marriages in wartime, and evidence relating to the postwar period suggests a variety of patterns across the country.⁴⁰ In any case, the concept of companionate marriage was a fluid one, used to summarize a wide range of ideas, although they had in common an emphasis on marriage not as an institution but as a relationship, involving partnership, teamwork, and sharing.⁴¹ The sociologists Michael Young and Peter Wilmott, writing in 1973, suggested that this progressive form of family life, as they saw it, had since the 1940s gradually percolated down through the class structure.⁴² The correspondence between the Pickards is the more remarkable for the evidence it offers of a married couple from a working-class background devising a marriage with companionate characteristics well before the 1970s.

The marriage that Chris and Stan depicted in their letters was characterized by emotional and sexual intimacy and cooperation and shared interest in work, home, and family, albeit across a gender divide in which work was primarily identified with him, and home with her. As mentioned, Chris was employed in the early years of her marriage, working in a laundry in Eastbourne until late April 1943, when she quit her job to join Stan for a few months at the naval base in Lowestoft where he was stationed. She returned to her parents' home in Eastbourne in September 1943 at the start of her pregnancy and did not do paid work again during or immediately after the war. Indeed, Stan was keen that she should be a full-time wife and mother. "I certainly do not approve

³⁶ Finch and Summerfield, "Social Reconstruction and the Emergence of Companionate Marriage."

³⁷ See, for example, Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques, and Clifford Slaughter, *Coal Is Our Life* (London, 1956); Elizabeth Bott, *Family and Social Networks* (London, 1957).

³⁸ Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, chaps. 7, 9; Cook and Cook, *Khaki Parish*; Christopher and Christopher, *Keep Smiling Through*. For another example, see Alexander, *Love in the Blitz*. One of the shortcomings of these collections is that they were written mainly during courtship rather than in the years of marriage itself.

³⁹ Such as the marriage of Eleanor Humphries; Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, chap. 5.

⁴⁰ Peter Wilmott and Michael Young, *Family and Class in a London Suburb* (London, 1960). Wilmott and Young found companionate marriages thriving among younger working-class couples in Bethnal Green in the 1950s. In contrast, Elizabeth Roberts's oral history study led her to conclude that few if any working-class marriages were companionate in Lancashire between 1940 and 1970; Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940–1970* (Oxford, 1995), 95–96.

⁴¹ Jane Lewis, "Public Institution and Private Relationship: Marriage and Marriage Guidance, 1920–1968," *Twentieth Century British History* 1, no. 3 (1990): 233–63.

⁴² Michael Young and Peter Wilmott, *The Symmetrical Family: A Study of Work and Leisure in the London Region* (London, 1973).

of the idea that you go out to work after the war. I am conservative enough to believe that a woman's place is in the home," he wrote in December 1943.⁴³

Historians have observed that the companionate marital style entailed numerous contradictions, concerning not only equality but also the long-term sustainability of relationships founded primarily on notions of sexual attraction and romantic love rather than duty and obligation.⁴⁴ Chris was aware of the potential problems, writing, "there are heaps of people who love each other at the beginning of their married life, but, after a few years it dies and leaves nothing behind."⁴⁵ Marriages were then, she believed, prone to infidelity as couples became alienated. This was why she emphasized the importance of both friendship and romance in their marriage and why she was constantly anxious about the possibility that Stan would form new relationships with women while he was away. "I hope you were a good boy when you went ashore on Saturday and remembered your poor little sweetheart sitting at home," she wrote in May 1941, shortly after Stan joined the navy, concluding her letter with a reminder of their own physical intimacy: "Kisses are'nt [*sic*] very thrilling on paper are they?"⁴⁶ Stan tended to ignore such admonitions while referring cheerfully to his lively social life in the navy, yet he also expressed anxiety about what his "poor little sweetheart" might be doing: "I'm afraid I am a very exacting husband in so far as I don't want you to even talk to another man whilst I'm away," he wrote in June 1942, a theme to which he returned frequently.⁴⁷

Jealous spats feature in the letters. Stan tried to reconcile the tensions with marital love: "Admittedly we quarrel—all couples do and I would be worried if we didn't because I believe that if two people constantly in each other's company do not quarrel then they are so disinterested in each other that they cannot possibly be in love."⁴⁸ However, his wartime and postwar absences put the companionate model, in which sharing was central, under strain, as each partner engaged with new experiences hundreds of miles from the other. This was particularly the case in the first year of peace, when Stan was still required to serve in the navy far from home and the couple's baby was hospitalized. The use of the resources of language and imaginative writing in the correspondence bore the burdens not only of providing a vector for personal cares and woes but also of building and preserving a cooperative, caring, and romantic marriage across the wartime divide. Letters were a vital lifeline for this wartime couple, as for many others, yet they also underline differences between the letter writers and the precariousness of the kind of marriage that they sought to build.

PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH

In the first half of 1944, when Chris was not writing lovingly of how much she missed Stan, responding angrily to his stories of flirtation, or telling him the family gossip, she wrote about her pregnancy and the question of where to have

⁴³ Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 26 December 1943, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/E.

⁴⁴ Langhamer, *English in Love*, 186–89.

⁴⁵ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 24 September 1941, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 2/E.

⁴⁶ Christabel Turnbull to Stanley Pickard, 19 May 1941, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 1/G.

⁴⁷ Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 15 June 1942, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 2/O.

⁴⁸ Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 7 July 1942, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 2/O (emphasis in original).



Figure 2—Stanley and Christabel Pickard, summer 1942, after Stanley had become a second lieutenant. (Courtesy of Jeremy Pickard.)

the baby. The historian Angela Davis describes the Second World War as a pivotal period in the shift from home to hospital births. Before 1939, most births took place at home, but wartime pronatalism favored the hospital in the interests of reducing both maternal and infant mortality.⁴⁹ Davis writes that, even so, “roughly two-

⁴⁹ Angela Davis, “Wartime Women Giving Birth: Narratives of Pregnancy and Childbirth, Britain c. 1939–1960,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 47, Part B (2014): 257–66, at 263.

thirds of births took place in hospital and one-third at home between the late 1940s and mid-1960s,” and it was only after this that medical opinion swung emphatically against home births.⁵⁰ The choices that Chris presented to Stan were between a nursing home and her own family home with a nurse and a doctor in attendance. She regarded hospital only as a backup “if anything happens at the time of the birth.”⁵¹ She had the support of her doctor in Eastbourne, who recommended a home birth. In 1944, health care had to be paid for wherever it was delivered. Chris did not mention the relative costs, but, while supporting the idea of a home birth, Stan replied telling Chris not to let “expense sway your decision at all.”⁵²

The interviews that Angela Davis conducted with women who gave birth in the postwar years throw light on Chris’s preference to avoid hospital. These women recall patronizing, abrupt, and authoritarian treatment from consultants and midwives in hospital from the 1940s to the 1960s, whereas they remember both cordial relationships with the doctors and midwives who attended them at home and consistency of care.⁵³ The later history of Chris’s interactions with hospital would confirm her negativity toward institutionalized care on just such grounds.

In other letters, the couple explored what becoming parents meant to them. Chris was concerned that her pregnancy and the added responsibility of a child were off-putting to Stan: “His arrival means so much more responsibility for you and you are rather young to be a father.”⁵⁴ He was just twenty-one when they married and twenty-three when the child was born, at a time when the average age of men at first marriage was twenty-four years and seven months.⁵⁵ Stan sought to reassure Chris in abstract terms, drawing on the evangelical Christianity to which both he and Chris subscribed. Quoting from the hymn “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken,” he contrasted their situation as a married couple expecting a baby with that of “philanderers,” writing “they never can and never will savour what the hymn we sang in church this morning calls the ‘solid joys’ of life. Theirs is an occasional highlight of pleasure . . . while we have the certain comfort of one another’s love and the supreme happiness of producing the ‘outward and visible sign’ of our love.”⁵⁶ He hoped that writing this would cure Chris “forever of asking me that

⁵⁰ Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, 92.

⁵¹ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 14 January 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/E.

⁵² Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 16 January 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/E.

⁵³ Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, 92–95.

⁵⁴ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 1 February 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/H.

⁵⁵ R. Schoen and J. Baj, “Twentieth-Century Cohort Marriage and Divorce in England and Wales,” *Population Studies* 38, no. 3 (1984): 439–49, at table 1, 442.

⁵⁶ Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 30 January 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/H. This hymn contains the following lines:

Fading is the worldling’s pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion’s members know.

“Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken,” John Newton, 1779. In Christian theology, the “outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace” describes the sacraments, of which baptism is the first. Church of England, “A Catechism,” in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662).

question ‘are you sorry you married me?’” Chris responded gratefully, “I don’t suppose many wives of nearly three years standing have such nice letters written them.”⁵⁷

It is difficult, however, not to conclude that Stan wrote knowingly of the “occasional highlight of pleasure,” which he continued to enjoy while they were apart, for all that he also relished the “solid joys” of married life. As a sublieutenant in the Royal Navy, he was stationed with Coastal Forces on the east coast of England from November 1942 to May 1945. His letters describe swimming, sailing, playing tennis and football, going to the cinema, and attending dances, punctuated by difficult and dangerous sorties on motor torpedo boats. His companions when off duty were frequently women, mostly Wrens—that is, members of the Women’s Royal Naval Service, some of whom he named, provoking flare-ups of suspicion and jealousy in Chris. Yet the image of a young man relishing a good time that he constructed in his letters was offset by his protestations of love for Chris and expressions of enthusiasm about the pregnancy and the arrival of “Laurence Paul,” the names they had chosen for the baby, should he be a boy. After leave in February 1944, four months before the child was born, Stan wrote on returning to base, “I felt downright miserable and nearly cried myself to sleep,” adding in another letter the next day, “The ache I feel for you seems to be getting steadily worse. I wonder why this separation has seemed so much harder than the others. Perhaps it’s because of Laurence Paul and perhaps because it looks like being longer than usual.”⁵⁸

Chris shared news of the bodily changes and health problems that she experienced during the pregnancy. In February 1944, she reported “another attack of that beastly inflammation,” tachycardia (heart rhythm disorder), and “tummy trouble.”⁵⁹ In March she was, in addition, suffering “the old kidney trouble” for which she was given a special diet and, because it was compounded by high blood pressure, she was ordered by the doctor to stay in bed, where she had to remain for most of the last three months of the pregnancy.⁶⁰ During this period, Stan’s letters, from Lowestoft and Felixstowe, were concerned and affectionate, while Chris’s tended to be waspish, referring frequently to Stan’s “little wren” and other women, until Stan protested, “What have I done to deserve such a punch in the eye? Ever since you have been ill I have written as long and as interesting each day as I possibly can, and have tried to say nothing which could hurt you.”⁶¹

The context, however, was that Chris was suffering and Stan, between hazardous naval sorties in the run-up to D-Day, was having fun. The polarization of their experiences in the last months of the pregnancy exposed the contradictions of companionate marriage in wartime. Chris, unwell and anxious, craved the comfort of Stan’s presence. Stan thought he was meeting her needs by sharing tales about his life in

⁵⁷ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 1 February 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/H.

⁵⁸ Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 19 February 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/I; Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 20 February 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/I.

⁵⁹ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 26 February 1944 >, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/J.

⁶⁰ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 11 March 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/L. In April, she was allowed to get up for two hours a day and to sit in the garden when it was warm. Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 6 April 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/O.

⁶¹ Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 24 March 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/M.

the navy, but far from reassuring her, his narratives underlined the dangerous and exciting world he lived in, so different from her own, and fueled her anxiety.

Nevertheless, in anticipation of Stan's coming leave, Chris wrote, "I do want to see you so much," and joked, "Daddy says the Second Front will open in three weeks' time, but I'm having it put off until after your leave."⁶² Chris's humor, though defiant, was that of the powerless, playing on the impossibility of what she proposed actually happening. Her lack of confidence in herself as a letter writer was a facet of this sense of deficit, which may have underpinned the jealousy and insecurity she expressed in relation to Stan's associations with other women.⁶³ It also erupted in relation to motherhood. She shared her feelings with Stan in early May 1944, writing that she was getting "not a little frightened . . . of the responsibility of being a mother. I do want to make a success of it, but I'm afraid I'm not good enough to have the care of a child."⁶⁴ Stan replied robustly, "In my opinion no fitter person has ever been born and I am sure you will make the most wonderful mother in the world." He added that, if he were not her husband, "the only one other thing I'd like to be is your son."⁶⁵

The language of this interchange deserves scrutiny. Chris's choice of words perhaps echoes the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott's formulation of the "good enough mother."⁶⁶ She may have heard Winnicott's BBC radio broadcasts in 1943 telling women both to trust their own instincts and to accept the guidance of experts like himself.⁶⁷ Stan's response appears to be an affectionate remark designed to flatter and reassure Chris. But in psychoanalytic terms, his positioning of himself as her son may communicate an unconscious need for Chris to mother him. Winnicott suggested that one of the many capacities that a mother needed was to be able to survive the "ruthless omnipotence" of her child and to contain, recognize, and integrate the dependent infant's strong and contradictory emotions toward her.⁶⁸ As seen above, the behavior Stan reported in his letters tested Chris.

The contrast between the couple's lives in May and June 1944 underlines the gendered experience of war: while Stan was destroying enemy shipping in the North Sea in anticipation of the Allied invasion of Europe, Chris was preparing to give birth in Eastbourne. Her mood could swing from lighthearted to gloomy within a few sentences in letters that combined cheerful updates on the baby's progress *in utero* with woeful accounts of weeping after visits from the doctor. Writing in pencil, in a hand that shrank in size during April and May, she told Stan, "I felt as if I'd had more trouble and worry these last three months than I could stand."⁶⁹ Stan's reply was

⁶² Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 22 March 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/M.

⁶³ R. Peter Hobson, "Is Jealousy a Complex Emotion?," in *Handbook of Jealousy: Theory, Research and Multidisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Sybil L. Hart and Maria Legerstee (London, 2010), 293–311.

⁶⁴ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 7 May 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/S.

⁶⁵ Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 11 May 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/S.

⁶⁶ Winnicott refined and published ideas he developed in the 1940s after the War. For his elaboration of the "good enough mother" see D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London, 1971), 10.

⁶⁷ Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, 119–21. See also Karpf, "Constructing and Addressing the 'Ordinary Devoted Mother,'" 99, 101. Karpf suggests that Winnicott's wartime broadcasts had wide appeal and long-lasting influence, heightened by wartime disruption of family life.

⁶⁸ See Hollway, "From Motherhood to Maternal Subjectivity," 14, 29.

⁶⁹ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 25 May 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/U.

supportive, if formulaic: “You have endured it all bravely and cheerfully with the result that you now have my greatest admiration as well as my deepest love.”⁷⁰

The long period of anxious anticipation, ill health, and enforced passivity ended with the triumphant delivery of a boy on 11 June 1944. The birth was largely independent, for all that Chris was at home, where her parents and sisters were able to help her, just as she had assisted at her younger sister’s delivery two years earlier. The importance of letter writing to the couple is evidenced by the fact that Chris wrote to Stan on the same day as the birth. Her letter was happy, composed, and written in bolder handwriting. “He’s awfully sweet and I’m thrilled to bits with him. It may sound absurd, but he’s awfully like you, with a real Pickard nose!” She explained that “I didn’t have nearly such a difficult time as they thought (24 hour labour),” that the baby weighed seven pounds, and that the nurse appeared minutes before he was born with the doctor following just after he had arrived.⁷¹ Chris’s euphoria speaks to what the psychoanalyst Dana Breen describes as “a sense of being in control, of being the active partner, being creative” in a problem-free experience of giving birth.⁷² Breen’s developmental approach also suggests that Chris’s prenatal anxieties were an important part of her unconscious preparation for motherhood. In Breen’s view “the ‘work of worrying’ and reconstructing relationships” is integral to making a positive adjustment to the major life changes associated with becoming a mother.⁷³

It was still wartime, however, and other sorts of anxieties had not been banished. The night after the birth, flying bomb attacks began, particularly affecting the south of England. These indiscriminate weapons were designed to create terror in response to the Allied invasion of Europe, which started on 6 June 1944. Although she made light of the attacks in her letters, Chris looked longingly toward the end of the war: “I shall be glad when this beastly war is over and air raid warnings are a thing of the past. I feel more than ever now that we have a baby that I want to be with you always.”⁷⁴ Reunion, however, was out of Chris’s control, and the couple’s separation continued for two more years.

The letters between Stan and Chris before and after the birth of their child in 1944 underline, simultaneously, the importance and the inadequacies of correspondence for emotional survival in the Second World War. As Martha Hanna argues in relation to France in World War I, “no one would have forgone correspondence. A letter was as essential as food, as longed-for as leave.”⁷⁵ Yet letters frequently failed to dispel anxiety and sometimes compounded it. Letter writers’ increased capacity for self-expression rendered both them and the disordered wartime world in which they lived more comprehensible and hence more manageable. But the separation that caused them to correspond meant they pursued their respective lives in contexts

⁷⁰ Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 28 May 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/U.

⁷¹ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 11 June 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 4/W.

⁷² Breen, *Birth of a First Child*, 168.

⁷³ Breen, 189.

⁷⁴ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 16 June 1944, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 5/A. Flying bombs were pilotless aircraft that exploded on hitting the ground after their engines had cut out. They were popularly known as doodlebugs.

⁷⁵ Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*, 295.

that words only partially illuminated and that sometimes seemed to the recipient not only shadowy but threatening.

THE NEW MOTHER AND THE SICK CHILD

Although the Second World War was officially over in August 1945, the demobilization of service personnel proceeded slowly. Many British couples experienced a “long Second World War” in which enforced separation continued for months or even years after the victory celebrations.⁷⁶ As mentioned above, Stan’s career with Coastal Forces ended in May 1945, but although he was given extended leave, he was not yet released from the navy. He was required to go to sea again in October 1945 and then, as part of the Allied Forces stationed in Occupied Germany, he was posted to Brunsbüttel, on the Kiel Canal in northern Germany, from December 1945 until May 1946. This period of separation severely challenged Chris and Stan’s key relationships, as a married couple and as parents, and their ability to keep up their correspondence. The pressure on Chris, as a new mother with an increasingly sick child, was intense. Here and below, I focus on maternal subjectivity and child hospitalization in the context of marital separation in the postwar period through the prism of Chris’s letters.

In her “unconventional history” of motherhood, Sarah Knott explains that, compared with the “massive paper trails” she is able to follow when working on her usual topic of eighteenth-century political revolutions, a focus on the mother from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century took her to “smaller, grittier ground” where “the drama is piecemeal and the record is fragmentary.”⁷⁷ Chris’s letters of 1945 to 1946 document her rising anxiety about her maternal capacities as the drama of her child’s ill health played out (figure 3). They offer a remarkably complete and unfragmented narrative.

Although motherhood began positively for Chris, her own and her baby’s well-being became increasingly precarious. In April 1945, she had a miscarriage, and her self-doubt now included the possibility that she would be unable to carry another baby.⁷⁸ Then, in December 1945, following Stan’s posting to Brunsbüttel, Chris wrote with increasing concern about their child’s deteriorating health, in particular his recurrent “tummy trouble.” As it worsened, she expressed conflicting feelings about the solutions proposed by the medical profession.

Wendy Hollway writes about a “strategy of normalization” of authority in twentieth-century Western countries, such that mothers took on the “aspirations, norms and desires which were being articulated” through, for instance, child welfare agencies.⁷⁹ Chris’s letters suggest that she was not a passive victim of such a strategy; she questioned it on the basis of her own instincts and knowledge at the same time as desiring Stan’s input. Early in December 1945, baby Laurie was admitted briefly to a hospital in Eastbourne for tests that proved inconclusive, and Chris was told to give him a special diet. Then, later the same month, Chris wrote to Stan, “I had

⁷⁶ Addison, *Now the War Is Over*, 20.

⁷⁷ Sarah Knott, *Mother Is a Verb: An Unconventional History* (New York, 2019), xii.

⁷⁸ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 3 April 1945, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 6/E.

⁷⁹ Hollway, “From Motherhood to Maternal Subjectivity,” 3.



Figure 3—Christabel and Laurence Pickard, ca. July 1944. Laurence’s distended stomach, which became the focus of medical investigations the following year, is clearly visible. (Courtesy of Jeremy Pickard.)

an awful shock this afternoon. A telegram arrived from the hospital saying I was to take Laurence at once for admission. I wondered for a few moments what it was all about, but soon gathered my wits and sent a reply saying ‘impossible.’ So now I suppose I shall have to write and tell them I’m not letting Laurie go into hospital at all.”⁸⁰ However, Chris’s resistance toward medical authority and her reluctance to hand over control of Laurie’s illness gave way to self-questioning: “I am worried because Laurie has lost weight. Only 5 ounces it is true, but I feel anxious about it just the same. I keep wondering whether I should have taken him to the hospital. If only you were here to advise me.”⁸¹

⁸⁰ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 20 December 1945, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 6/P.

⁸¹ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 28 December 1945, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 6/O.

In positioning Stan as an adviser in her letters from this period, Chris was preserving the idea that he had a valuable contribution to make as a father despite the geographical distance between them, while assuming for herself responsibility and decision-making power as a mother. In Stan's absence abroad in 1945–46, however, she was relatively isolated. Fulfilling the aspirations of many postwar couples to establish their own marital home apart from their parents, Chris and Stan had rented a house in the summer of 1945 in Polegate, just outside Eastbourne where both their families of origin continued to live. Chris's experiences in this home of her own were social and familial: her letters refer to her younger sister Poppy living temporarily with her, her father helping her when the roof developed a leak, and, in 1946, visits to the hospital with her mother-in-law, father, and Stan's elder sister. But the letters also delineate multiple fractures in this support network. Chris's mother was chronically unwell, suffering from epilepsy; her father's work in the building trade was erratic; and her sisters were younger and had their own problems. Indeed, as the eldest of four children, Chris frequently took responsibility for the Turnbull family rather than the other way round.⁸² As far as Stan's family was concerned, his elder sister, Joan, tried to help Chris but was working away from home during and after the war, and although Chris became closer to her mother-in-law, she often found her mean and cantankerous.⁸³ The potential for "distributed or dispersed forms of mothering" that would have relieved and supported Chris was frequently compromised.⁸⁴ Chris's letters in 1945–46 indicate that she often felt lonely and anxious.

The mutuality of the marriage is, however, still evident in the letters from this period. Just as Chris wanted Stan's advice, so Stan asked her for help and comfort when he needed it. In December 1945, for example, he wrote at length about his problems fulfilling his duties as first lieutenant and president of the mess on the naval base at Brunsbüttel. These included organizing mess parties, buying rounds of drinks, entertaining the guests, and gambling. Stan liked having fun, but his relatively precarious social status and lack of financial means, coupled with his evangelical Christianity, made these tasks agonizing to him. He reported to Chris that he had asked for and been granted demotion and hoped that she would not cease to love "this unsuccessful husband of yours."⁸⁵ Chris replied at length, on Christmas Day 1945, reassuring him that she admired him for the step he had taken: "Please don't think you are a failure because you've admitted a job is beyond you. It's much, much better to do that than to have gone on trying to change your nature, as so many other men would have done."⁸⁶ After several pages, she turned from his state of mind to her own. On a page marked by smudges, she confessed, "I am crying and I'm sure I must look most ugly. But I feel so miserable without you."⁸⁷

⁸² Email communication with Jeremy Pickard, 28 June 2020.

⁸³ For example, in March 1946, Chris wrote crossly to Stan about "Mother" keeping for herself a gift of eggs intended for Laurie. Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 9 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/J.

⁸⁴ On this concept, see Knott, "Theorizing and Historicizing Mothering's Many Labours," 9.

⁸⁵ Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 24 December 1945, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 6/O.

⁸⁶ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 25 December 1945, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 6/O.

⁸⁷ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 25 December 1945, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 6/O.

Stan, in turn, wrote telling her how much he regretted not being there to share the worry of their son's ill health.

Chris's letters trace a path toward her decision to send Laurie to hospital that was longer and more agonizing than Stan's route to his resolve to seek demotion. In early January 1946, at the clinic, Chris found that Laurie had lost more weight. She consulted the doctor, who said that "his spleen had hardened and that his liver was still very much enlarged and would I not reconsider my decision and let him go into hospital if she could manage to get them to offer another bed. I didn't know what to do, but decided I ought to let him go." Chris agonized over whether she had "been doing the right thing," writing, "I've been just as strict with his diet and couldn't understand why he should have this relapse. But the Doctor said she feared this would happen though she didn't say why. You've no idea how miserable I've been this week . . . I've wished over and over again that you were here to advise me."⁸⁸ Stan replied comfortingly, but his response focused on practical and financial aspects. He shared the responsibility for refusing to send Laurie to hospital earlier, and he supported Chris's decision now: "I'm sure you are doing the right thing, the only thing in fact, in trying to have him admitted." He attempted to counter Chris's anxiety about the cost of medical care in these years before the National Health Service, writing, "Take no heed to the expense. If it costs us our last penny to get him well again it will be worth it."⁸⁹

In the main, however, the couple's letters indicate the increasingly polarized nature of their experiences in these months. Stan's letters were full of his adventures in Occupied Germany. He wrote of enjoying his new job as berthing officer without the menace of actual warfare, and of relishing his spare time without the burden of playing host to fellow officers. His lengthy narratives brim over with the excitement and novelty of learning to drive, exploring the locality, going hunting, trading with cigarettes, and attending Wren parties. Chris wrote of domestic cares, family concerns and, above all, her anxiety about sending eighteen-month-old Laurie to hospital and the emotional pain of separation from him.

THE HARMFUL HOSPITAL AND THE DEPRIVED MOTHER

Richard Titmuss, looking back in 1957, described the situation of British hospital care before the establishment of the National Health Service in bleak terms. By 1948, all varieties of hospital had suffered "a decade of sacrifice and neglect, financial poverty and disorganization." Moreover, uncertainty about future reorganization meant that "in the three years between the end of the war and the introduction of the Health Service . . . hospital conditions deteriorated further."⁹⁰ This was precisely the period in which Chris faced the dilemma of hospitalizing her son. When a bed became available at King's College Hospital, London, in January 1946, she reluctantly accepted it, believing that Laurie would need to stay only briefly for tests and fearing that if she refused this opportunity she would never be offered another one.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 4 January 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 6/N.

⁸⁹ Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 9 January 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 6/N.

⁹⁰ Richard M. Titmuss, *Essays on "The Welfare State"* (London, 1958), 153.

⁹¹ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 11 January 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 6/M.

Two interconnected themes stand out in the letters Chris wrote while Laurie was in hospital, a stay that lasted not for a few days but nearly three months. One theme concerns her interactions with the hospital regime and her fears that hospitalization was, paradoxically, harming her child. The other is about the effects of separation from Laurie on her own mental well-being. Throughout, the epistolary dialogue with Stan continued to shape the contours of their marriage.

The postwar years saw very significant efforts to build the British welfare state, including plans to absorb all types of hospital into a centralized and better-funded system of provision that was free to users. However, such structural change did not bring with it the reform of hospital regimes with regard to infant care. The idea that the physical separation of a mother from a baby was harmful for the child had circulated since the late nineteenth century, but in the postwar years psychoanalysts at, for example, the Tavistock Clinic in London stressed the psychological damage that separation from their mothers could inflict on children. Anna Freud, Donald Winnicott, and, in particular, John Bowlby developed and popularized theories of the attachment of young children to their mothers, the anxiety caused by separation, and the harmful consequences of “maternal deprivation.”⁹² Hospital management systems in the 1940s, however, took no cognizance of these new psychoanalytical theories.

To Chris it seemed a matter of common sense that her child needed her, both physically and emotionally. At the end of January 1946, she asked Stan, “Why can’t there be hospitals for children where their Mother’s [*sic*] can stay also [?] I hadn’t realised until now just how much Laurie meant to me.”⁹³ Such provision was a long way off, and the advent of the National Health Service in 1948 made no difference to this aspect of hospital care, which changed only as a result of the sustained campaigns of psychoanalysts and parents in the 1950s and 1960s.⁹⁴ These developments, which were too late for Laurence and Chris, have been discussed by historians in terms of pressure groups and policies.⁹⁵ Chris’s letters contribute the perspective of lived experience to the history of the rigid regimes that campaigners sought to change.

Chris’s accounts of her hospital visits are of remarkably restricted glimpses of Laurie coupled with frequent prohibitions on touching or holding him. After taking him to the hospital, she and her mother-in-law were allowed to witness him eating his first meal only “through the glass of the doors.”⁹⁶ According to Chris’s letters, Kings College Hospital permitted children to have one visit a week, on Sundays, although visitors were often allowed to do no more than see children

⁹² John Bowlby, *Maternal Care and Mental Health* (Geneva, 1952), republished as *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (London, 1953). See also Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, 120, 122–23; Shapira, *War Inside*, 201–14. These ideas were criticized both at the time and later. For contemporary arguments among psychoanalysts, see Shapira, *War Inside*, 221. For a classic expression of the later feminist critique of the exclusive focus on the mother, see Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (London, 1974), 218–19.

⁹³ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 31 January 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/E.

⁹⁴ “A Two-Year-Old Goes to Hospital: A Film Shown by John Bowlby and James Robertson at the Tavistock Clinic,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, no. 46 (1952): 425–26; Central Health Services Council, *The Welfare of Children in Hospital: Report of a Committee of the Central Health Services Council* (London, 1959); Mold, “Repositioning the Patient,” 234–39.

⁹⁵ See, in particular, Hendrick, “Children’s Emotional Well-Being and Mental Health.”

⁹⁶ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 17 January 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/A.

from a distance. A Ministry of Health inquiry in 1951 indicates that this practice was relatively liberal. Other London hospitals allowed no visiting of children under three, and some permitted only monthly visits, in the belief that contact would be unsettling and, ironically, would introduce infection.⁹⁷ In her letters, Chris wavered between confessing her anxieties to Stan (“I felt really sick at having to leave him there and still keep thinking I can hear him calling”) and adopting a reassuring tone (“Don’t worry too much about Laurie darling. I’m trying not to. He’s such a good little chap and so easy to manage that I’m sure he’ll be all right”).⁹⁸

Chris’s confidence in the hospital treatment was shaken, however, by evidence that Laurie, who had been admitted for tests, was becoming increasingly sick. On 27 January 1946, she wrote, “I’m feeling very miserable and depressed this evening. We found Laurie rather fretful and unwell. Apparently he has had a bad chill and has been running a temperature.”⁹⁹ On Sunday, 3 February 1946, she visited to find that he had been moved to a side ward, “his head all swathed in bandages and looking so very white and ill.”¹⁰⁰ She was only allowed to “peep through the crack in the door” at him, on the grounds that he had “now caught an ear infection” and had a high temperature. She was consumed with anxiety: “He was just lying there with his eyes half shut and taking no interest in anything. Surely surely, if he were very ill they would tell me?”¹⁰¹

Then Chris’s doctor in Eastbourne started to talk to her about the results of Laurie’s tests. The first was “a dreadful shock,” seeming to suggest the hospital pediatrician had found that “Laurie has cysts in his kidneys and there is nothing he can do about them as an operation is out of the question.”¹⁰² Chris was then told at the hospital a few days later that the cysts were only suspected and not definite.¹⁰³ Even though in a letter to Stan two weeks later she was able to confirm that “there are no cysts,” she reported that the tests on Laurie’s liver showed that it was enlarged. Furthermore, she was told that “he is having a mastoid operation this afternoon.” This was an operation to remove part of the mastoid bone behind the ear. It was baffling to Chris. She wrote, “He hasn’t actually got mastoids but the Sister called it a mastoid operation.”¹⁰⁴

In Chris’s account, she became increasingly determined to overcome the medically sanctioned divide between herself and her son. She wrote that she insisted on seeing a doctor at the hospital and was told that the need for the operation was the result of Laurie’s ear infection and that he would have to stay in hospital another two or three weeks after it. His arms were put in splints, as restraints, and he had a cough and a rash. “I got very annoyed and told the Doctor I wasn’t satisfied and that the child had contracted all these complaints since he went into hospital but all she would say was ‘It’s most unfortunate and I’m very sorry.’”¹⁰⁵ Eighteen-month old Laurie had been

⁹⁷ As quoted by Shapira, *War Inside*, 215. See also Michael Jolley, “A Social History of Paediatric Nursing, 1920–1970” (PhD diss., University of Hull, 2003), 15–16.

⁹⁸ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 17 January 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/A.

⁹⁹ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 27 January 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/C.

¹⁰⁰ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 3 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/E.

¹⁰¹ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 3 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/F.

¹⁰² Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 8 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/G.

¹⁰³ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 11 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/H.

¹⁰⁴ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 25 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/J.

¹⁰⁵ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 25 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/J.

in hospital since 10 January, and it was now 25 February. He was still there on 11 March. Chris reported, “He still has his arms in splints to prevent him pulling his bandages off and that worries me dreadfully. And the Sister says he has got into the habit of screaming for an hour usually beginning at 8:00 pm. That worries me too, for as you know he’s always been so good about going to bed.”¹⁰⁶ By now Chris’s handwriting had deteriorated to a penciled scrawl.

Michael Jolley’s oral history-based research on pediatric nursing suggests that Laurie’s experience was not unique. Jolley interviewed nurses who had worked on children’s wards and adults who had been hospitalized as children in the period 1920 to 1970. The nurses described regimes in which hospital staff were trained to adopt a “scientific” approach within disciplined and hierarchical institutions that valued “emotional neutrality” and efficiency.¹⁰⁷ Former child patients felt that “while their bodies were cared for, their other needs were largely ignored by both the system and the individual nurses;” for example, “crying was an undesirable behaviour, to be extinguished by ignoring it.”¹⁰⁸ Chris’s letters suggest that, in addition, in Laurie’s case and evidently in those of other child patients in the postwar period, bodily and emotional needs were not adequately met, and infections spread in the hospital. Doctors and nurses did not take parents into their confidence but imposed solutions without consultation. Jolley comments that “parents were ignored . . . in much the same way” as the child patients.¹⁰⁹

Maternal anxiety was affecting Chris’s capacity for correspondence. On 18 March, she referred explicitly to the effects of her distress on letter writing: “This is my umpteenth attempt at writing to you. Actually I started last night but couldn’t concentrate so gave it up and went to bed. You see I had another disappointment yesterday and Laurie is not coming home this week after all. His ear is healing and going on very well but he is now covered in a dry rash and is seeing a skin specialist.” In addition, there was to be another X-ray of Laurie’s kidneys. Exasperated, Chris wrote, “Honestly I almost despair of getting Laurie home at all.” She learned from other mothers who were visiting their children that “it is the usual thing for children in hospital to catch every complaint in the ward” and heard of a child going to hospital with a broken leg on the understanding he would be there for two days, “but he caught measles, whooping cough, impetigo, and stayed there three months!!!”¹¹⁰ Chris’s multiple exclamation marks speak to her frustration. To add insult to injury, it was costing Chris and Stan twenty-eight shillings a week to keep Laurie in hospital, while the child allowance included in Stan’s naval pay as a lieutenant was only two shillings a week.¹¹¹ The mounting debt aggravated Chris’s anxiety. In late February, she wrote, “I’m worrying now about paying the hospital bill, it’s going to be pretty terrific and we’ve no money.”¹¹²

Interactions with the hospital were one story that Chris told in her letters. The other, overlapping theme concerned Chris’s emotional navigation of her separation

¹⁰⁶ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 11 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/K.

¹⁰⁷ Jolley, “Social History of Paediatric Nursing,” 182.

¹⁰⁸ Jolley, 180, 184.

¹⁰⁹ Jolley, 180.

¹¹⁰ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 18 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/L.

¹¹¹ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 17 January 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/A.

¹¹² Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 27 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/K.

from her baby. In a letter of early January 1946, before Laurie was admitted, Chris anticipated her own and Laurie's feelings concerning his impending departure, writing, "I'm going to be dreadfully lonely without him, and I'm wondering too if he will grieve for me."¹¹³ Although her letters vividly delineate the impact on maternal subjectivity of a rupture in the mother-child relationship, this dimension was largely unconsidered in medical theory. It was missing even from the new psychoanalytic approaches of the 1940s and 1950s—focused, as shown above, on the effects of maternal deprivation on young children. As Wendy Hollway writes, these developments belonged within a long tradition of recognizing maternal work almost exclusively in terms of its impact on the child. The mother, as a subject in her own right, was not addressed before feminist interventions in the 1970s and later.¹¹⁴

Chris's letters document the agonies a mother could go through as a result of separation from her young child. The day after leaving Laurie at the hospital, she wrote to Stan, "You've no idea how I've missed Laurie. Every time I've heard a child outside I thought it was he until I remembered he wasn't here."¹¹⁵ The alarming deterioration in Laurie's health told on Chris heavily. On 27 January 1946, she wrote, "I'm feeling very miserable and depressed this evening. . . . It nearly broke my heart this afternoon to see him so miserable and unwell. . . . I hope they will decide to let me have him home. I feel I cannot stand another week without him. I wish over and over again that you were here, I feel so dreadfully lonely."¹¹⁶ Laurie's absence filled her thoughts and robbed her of purpose: "I'm still feeling very unhappy and will until I get my baby back again, the house seems dead and I have so little to do."¹¹⁷ Even the distraction of a party with one of her sisters, with "lovely things to eat," party games, and dancing, did not ease her anxiety: "I kept thinking of my poor little baby and felt like a traitor for being out at a party when he is so poorly and so unhappy."¹¹⁸

As Laurie's health deteriorated, Chris expressed increasing anger, directed not only at the hospital but also at those close to her, including Stan. Part of her wanted Stan to come back, but another part did not. In a letter in early February, she wondered whether to send a telegram asking him to get urgent compassionate leave, but rejected the idea. This was when she wrote, "I don't know that I want you home anyway. I feel as if I hate everybody and my heart is a piece of stone. I quite well wish everyone off the face of the earth and wouldn't bother if they went. I only want my baby. It seems that ever since I started him I had nothing but trouble and worry."¹¹⁹

The ambivalence in Chris's letters at this time, on a spectrum from love to hate, acceptance to rejection, concerning both Stan and Laurie, speaks to the extreme mental disturbance that the experience of dual separation was causing her. It is not

¹¹³ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 4 January 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 6/N.

¹¹⁴ Hollway, "From Motherhood to Maternal Subjectivity," 8.

¹¹⁵ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 18 January 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/A.

¹¹⁶ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 27 January 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/C.

¹¹⁷ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 28 January 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/D.

¹¹⁸ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 29 January 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/D.

¹¹⁹ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 3 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/E. This letter was followed by another apologizing for the possible effect of her words on Stan; Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 4 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/G.

necessary to adopt an essentialist view of mothers' "natural feelings" to understand Chris's emotions about the separation from her baby. In mid-twentieth-century Britain, the "ideal of maternal love," to use Rozsika Parker's concept, was powerful and pervasive. It was also contradictory: Parker argues that the ideal made it difficult for mothers to acknowledge their less than loving feelings for a child and thus to integrate negative feelings with positive ones.¹²⁰ The maternal ideal, based on a model of the infant's dependency and confidence in its mother, encapsulated the idea that mothers felt only affection, love, responsibility, and protectiveness toward their children.¹²¹ The hospitalization had taken away Chris's capacity to fulfil these cultural, physical, and emotional requirements central to the concept of the "good enough mother,"¹²² and it threatened the trust that, she felt, had built up between her child and herself. Simultaneously, she could not access the supposed benefits of a companionate marriage. Her husband's presence was represented only by scrawled words on flimsy pages that told her of a life of entirely different emotional imperatives.

Parker writes of maternal "paralysis" affecting mothers who were experiencing conflicting emotions concerning their children.¹²³ When writing of her difficulties composing letters, Chris repeatedly described feelings of being hardened or shrunk by her experiences of Laurie's hospitalization. In addition to saying "my heart is a piece of stone," she wrote, "my brain seems to have shrunk to a little hard nut and I can't concentrate on anything"; "I feel so bewildered about it all that I can't think properly"; "I'm too bewildered and miserable to think."¹²⁴ Stan was not insensitive to these signs of distress and managed to arrange a few days' leave in mid-February, scrounging a seat on a Royal Air Force plane bound for Bury St. Edmonds, followed by a succession of train journeys south to Polegate. But his letters on his return to Brunsbüttel were full of Wren parties, a new secretary, black-market trading, and driving adventures, including a trip to Copenhagen. Even though Stan wrote supportively about Laurie, he did not address Chris's emotional dislocations on paper, and his tales of life in Germany stimulated her anger and jealousy.¹²⁵

The mastoid operation on 25 February 1946 marked the peak of Chris's distracted anxiety. As Laurie recovered from it, Chris allowed herself to mention her own needs in her letters. She admitted to Stan that her health was deteriorating: "I shall have to pay the Dr a visit one evening this week. I have my old pain back again. I expect she will give me M&B as I had before. And I also want to show her my leg I have a vein burst and it spread like a big bruise all down my thigh and is most painful."¹²⁶ Upset

¹²⁰ Parker, *Torn in Two*, 35.

¹²¹ Hollway, "From Motherhood to Maternal Subjectivity," 13.

¹²² Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 10.

¹²³ Rozsika Parker, "The Production and Purposes of Maternal Ambivalence," in *Mothering and Ambivalence*, ed. Wendy Hollway and Brid Featherstone (London, 1997), 17–36, at 29.

¹²⁴ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 3 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/F; Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 6 February 1946, 8 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/G.

¹²⁵ For such letters from Stan to Chris, see Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 20 February 1946, 22 February 1946, 23 February 1946, 26 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/J. For an example of Chris's hostile responses, see Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 25 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/J: "A pity the Signal Centre is closing down, what will you do for a girl friend then? Any chance of your new secretary taking over?"

¹²⁶ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 27 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/K. M&B was a sulphonamide, one of the first antibiotic medicines, produced by a firm called May and Baker.

and fatigued, she expressed a desperate need for her companionate husband and evinced acute frustration with the tenuous link provided by their correspondence. Her punctuation, which had improved over the five years of regular letter writing, went to pieces: “I do wish you were here darling everything seems to go wrong when you’re away and letters take so long to reach you, and so long before I receive a reply God bless you come home soon.”¹²⁷ Twelve days later, Chris reported worriedly about Laurie screaming at bedtime. If the child was protesting from his hospital bed, the mother was punishing herself: Chris had still not seen the doctor about her kidney pain. She wrote, in pencil, in a rushed scrawl, “I hate the thought of taking those M&B things they make me feel so ill.”¹²⁸

Lucy Noakes writes of the ways in which war and gender combine to limit agency and to reduce the resources available for “traversing and managing the challenges of the modern world.”¹²⁹ Chris, in the early months of 1946, desperately wanted things that it was not in her power to obtain: Laurie’s recovery and return from hospital, Stan’s release from the navy and his return from Germany, an improvement in her own health. Her capacity to achieve these things was limited by the institutional power of the hospital that kept her apart from her child, by the wartime mobilization that required her husband to be far away, and by her bodily responses to the stress that both separations inflicted on her. Nevertheless, in a letter of 20 March 1946, she described doing what she could regarding the hospital. She insisted that Laurie must come home the following Sunday, deploying a hunch that a case made on paternal grounds rather than one based on her own needs as a mother would carry weight. She would not be rebuffed, responding, when a nurse told her that the doctor had yet to make final investigations, that he must do so urgently because Stan was coming home on leave the following weekend (which he was not) and that he must see his child: “I shall probably never go to heaven when I die for telling so many lies, but if they have results I shan’t mind so much.”¹³⁰

On Sunday, 24 March, Chris’s strategy paid off, and she was finally allowed to take Laurie home after ten weeks in hospital. The outcome of his long stay was not positive. The tests had been inconclusive: “although his liver and spleen are enlarged they cannot account for it”; while his ear “is still discharging and looks an awful mess and he still has that rash.” Chris was also sensitive to her son’s psychological condition: “You would be most upset if you could see the ‘lost’ look on his little face, and see his skinny little arms and legs . . . he can’t walk or even stand on his feet . . . I had rather a bother getting him to bed.”¹³¹ Chris’s experience of the hospital regime and Laurie’s deterioration led her to assert to Stan, “I’ve quite made up my mind that this is the last time Laurie ever goes to hospital.”¹³² Chris reiterated the point in subsequent letters, and chastised herself for what had happened: “I’ve never regretted anything so much as letting him go to hospital.”¹³³

¹²⁷ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 27 February 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/K.

¹²⁸ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 11 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/K.

¹²⁹ Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, 102.

¹³⁰ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 20 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/M.

¹³¹ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 24 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/N.

¹³² Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 18 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/L.

¹³³ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 26 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/N.

As her battle for Laurie's discharge showed signs of success, Chris refashioned herself in the letters along two axes: of the competent mother who understood the physical and psychological needs of her child, and of the loving wife who appreciated her companionate husband. On the first, she wrote of the preparations she made for Laurie's return so that she could dedicate time to his readjustment, and documented her patient nurturing of her son, physically and mentally.¹³⁴ She evidently followed the sort of routine advocated by the early twentieth-century pediatrician Frederick Truby King, involving regular meal and sleep times and as much "open air and sunlight. . . as possible."¹³⁵ However, she was more flexible than King concerning comfort and reassurance, writing of taking the child into bed with her when he cried on the first night he was back and soothing and cuddling him when she thought he needed it.¹³⁶ She wrote of resocializing her child: she took Laurie on outings and arranged visits by members of her family to see and play with him. She rejoiced in Laurie's rediscovery of affection for her, telling Stan, "he likes nothing better than to sit on my lap and kiss me, and I like nothing better than for him to do it."¹³⁷

Nevertheless, there were difficulties arising from the long weeks of separation. Although any signs of frustration in Chris were directed more at the hospital than the child, her account was punctuated by reports of Laurie's ongoing sleeping problems. A week after he had come home, she wrote, "I just cannot understand what they did to him in hospital it seems as if all his good training is wasted. He still wakes in the night and cries for the light to be put on."¹³⁸ Her use of the term "training" suggests her absorption of advice literature about child rearing, possibly from a range of sources.¹³⁹ There was evidently little help available, however, to enable her to understand Laurie's responses to the trauma of hospitalization.

Simultaneously, Chris expressed her need for Stan, but now as a domestic partner rather than a source of advice: "I do wish you could be here darling to help for a day or two until Laurie becomes his old self. I shall need to devote all my time to him at least until he's able to walk, and it would be nice to have you around. Do hurry and come home."¹⁴⁰ There is evidence in the letters that Stan was, indeed, the kind of hands-on husband and father expected within the companionate model, who, when at home, shopped, made meals, and cleared up while Chris cared for the baby. Stan wrote in late April, "I will take charge when I come home next month and give you a rest. Washing napkins will come easy to me."¹⁴¹ Chris also took steps toward rebuilding the intimacy and desire between herself and Stan that had

¹³⁴ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 23 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/N.

¹³⁵ F. Truby King, *The Expectant Mother and Baby's First Month* (London, 1924), 13, as quoted in Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, 116.

¹³⁶ Other postwar mothers, interviewed in the 2000s, thought it was wrong to be physically distant from their babies. Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, 118.

¹³⁷ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 30 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/O.

¹³⁸ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 31 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/P.

¹³⁹ Davis comments on mothers' eclectic approach to such literature from 1945 to 2000; Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, 114.

¹⁴⁰ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 24 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/N.

¹⁴¹ Stanley Pickard to Christabel Pickard, 21 April 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/S. See also Pickard, *Stan and Chris*, 201, editor's note. For a history of fatherhood in this period, see Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914–1960* (Oxford, 2015).

been ruptured by their separation and blotted out by their child's illness. In one of her letters, just before Laurie came home, she referred to an erotic dream: "I dreamed last night that you were making love to me and very thrilling it was too. But I woke up before you got very far, what a disappointment!"¹⁴² Practical help and sexual partnership as a couple, in the context of a loving relationship with their child, were the parameters of the family regrouping that Chris was anticipating in her letters: "I'm longing to have you home darling, everything would be complete then and it would be grand for Laurie to have his 'Da-da' home."¹⁴³

The family was, eventually, reunited in May 1946, nearly two months after Laurie's discharge. The story has a tragic postscript, however. Laurence Paul's health deteriorated over the subsequent years, and in spite of local medical attention and experimentation with dietary and homeopathic cures, he died of liver failure aged five in 1950. His parents refused to allow him to return to hospital.¹⁴⁴ The couple's confidence was evidently too completely undermined by their experiences in 1946 for them to regard even free hospital care under the National Health Service as an option they would take.

CONCLUSION

The letters in this collection give access to emotions provoked by a particular set of circumstances during and after the Second World War, characterized and amplified by separation. We can see in them the efforts of two writers from working-class backgrounds in 1940s Britain to manage themselves, their anxieties, and their relationship through the years they were largely apart. Viewed as a technology of the self, the letters made their writers visible to themselves, and offered a means by which they could grasp, construct, and deploy their feelings, whether through protestations of romantic love or narratives of day-to-day events and challenges or by anticipating reunion and imagining the family they would become. The correspondents created personae for themselves and each other and a plot for the story of their relationship.¹⁴⁵

The letters also illustrate occasions when epistolarity did not work well as a means of self-management. If "composure" characterizes letters that are both fluently composed and communicate the writer's sense of psychic ease, "discomposure" marks letters produced when neither of these things is within the writer's reach.¹⁴⁶ At such points, letters are infused by a struggle to put words on paper and by unwitting lapses of grammar and punctuation: it is difficult to write out a self that is plagued by

¹⁴² Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 23 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/N.

¹⁴³ Christabel Pickard to Stanley Pickard, 29 March 1946, TK, SxMOA99_166_Pickard 7/O.

¹⁴⁴ Pickard, *Stan and Chris*, 329, editor's note.

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth MacArthur, *Extravagant Narratives: Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form* (Princeton, 1990), 119.

¹⁴⁶ On the concept of composure, see Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994), 23–25; Roper, "Splitting in Unsent Letters"; Penny Summerfield, "Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews," *Cultural and Social History* 1 no. 1 (2004): 65–93 and "Dis/composing the Subject: Intersubjectivities in Oral History," in *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, ed. Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield (London, 2000), 91–106.

doubts and disturbed by events that seem to be beyond the individual's control. In Christabel Pickard's case, as her son's body, and her own, deteriorated, her letter writing bore testimony to a sense of paralysis that was both psychological and emotional. It was heightened by the experiential imbalance between herself as a wife and mother at home and Stan as a husband away at war.

This correspondence suggests that when experience diverges widely and anxiety escalates on one side but not the other, the burden carried by letters expands. Much historical work on wartime correspondence focuses on the alleged inability of those at home to comprehend the experiences of men on the front line. This set of letters draws attention to the flip side: a woman's sense that her front-line husband could not understand her domestic anxieties. For Chris, as marriage and motherhood became increasingly difficult, the freight of love, care, and reassurance borne by the letters she received from Stan was at the same time vital to her emotional survival and never completely adequate. Such discrepancies could lead to abandonment of the attempt to communicate, but Chris and Stan's correspondence continued. Chris managed to inscribe in her letters both the depths of her despair and, more easily, her eventual recovery of self-confidence as a mother; she also reimagined herself as a wife and redrew the contours of the companionate marriage to which she aspired and to which Stan, too, looked forward. Her persistence points to the recuperative potential of epistolarity, for the individual and the relationship.

Nevertheless, the correspondence illustrates the strain placed on marriage by World War II, a period in which the divorce rate rose substantially.¹⁴⁷ Wartime mobility, with over five million men in the armed forces and nearly half a million women in the auxiliaries, offered opportunities for sociability and exploration that frequently had a sexual dimension.¹⁴⁸ While the letters of service personnel to spouses and sweethearts were unlikely to be frank about such things, narratives of off-duty life like those that Stanley Pickard sent home hinted at the possibilities. Throughout the long separation, Stan, like many other husbands, endeavored to stitch together the torn fabric of married life through the habit of regular and affectionate letter writing.¹⁴⁹ However, his self-constructions portrayed not only a devoted husband and father but also a young adventurer, two personae that coexisted uneasily. Companionate marriage, founded on ideas of romance, mutual sexual attraction, and domestic sharing, rather than primarily on those of duty and obligation, was particularly vulnerable to such tensions.¹⁵⁰

The letters also document in detail the lived experience of motherhood. Medical theories concerning childbirth were plentiful in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and saw an upsurge from the 1940s to the 1960s. Historians might search for perspectives other than those of the theorists, but, as Joanna Bourke among others has noted, "Diaries, letters, oral histories and memoirs provide relatively few

¹⁴⁷ The number of divorces in England and Wales rose from 8,254 in 1939 to 60,254 in 1947; "Divorces in England and Wales," Office for National Statistics, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/divorce/bulletins/divorcesinenglandandwales/2011-12-08#divorce-rates>.

¹⁴⁸ They often also included epistolary flirtations. See Alison Twells, "Sex, Gender, and Romantic Intimacy in Servicemen's Letters during the Second World War," *Historical Journal* 63, no. 3 (2020): 732–53.

¹⁴⁹ See, in particular, Abrams, "Wartime Family Romance."

¹⁵⁰ Langhamer, "Adultery in Post-War England."

accounts of childbirth labour” or of the maternal practices that followed it.¹⁵¹ In the case of this correspondence, however, a new mother found words for the experience of pregnancy, birth, and the unfolding relationship with her little child. She did so because of wartime separation, because of her commitment to shared parenting, and because of her loyalty to her husband, which propelled her to write, even when her doubts, fears, and conflicting feelings made it hard to do so.

As with maternity, so with child hospitalization: much has been written from a top-down perspective but little from that of young patients and parents enduring separation. The correspondence explored here documents the experience of child hospitalization from below, specifically from a mother’s standpoint, in the period between the end of the war and the creation of the National Health Service in 1948, when hospitals were run down and awaiting reorganization while still requiring users to pay for their services. It reveals the agonizing effects on a mother of compulsory separation from a child in a hospital with a rigid and evidently medically unsafe regime.

The strict emotional regime of family separation in the hospital was at odds with modern understandings of the emotional demands of family relationships, whether discussed by psychoanalysts or practiced by women like Chris. It profoundly frustrated any woman’s efforts to reach the standards of the good enough mother in accordance with the maternal ideal of the time, and it contradicted the companionate ideal of close communication between spouses. The contrast between the impersonal discipline of the hospital model and expectations of loving devotion within families speaks to other emotional discrepancies in the 1940s. Like hospitals, British institutions such as schools and the armed forces based their regimes on the idea of emotional restraint and the culture of the stiff upper lip characterized by self-control and the denial of vulnerability. For the millions of individuals who experienced wartime separation, including service personnel, prisoners of war, child and adult evacuees, and those left behind at home, these influences, working against ideals of emotional expressiveness, can only have contributed to the emotional turmoil of the wartime and postwar world. The letters between Christabel and Stanley Pickard provide a rare and vivid account of emotional navigation of the minefield of family separations in the long Second World War.

¹⁵¹ Joanna Bourke, “Becoming the ‘Natural’ Mother in Britain and North America: Power, Emotions and the Labour of Childbirth between 1947 and 1967,” *Past and Present*, no. 246, Supplement 15 (2020): 92–114, at 93.